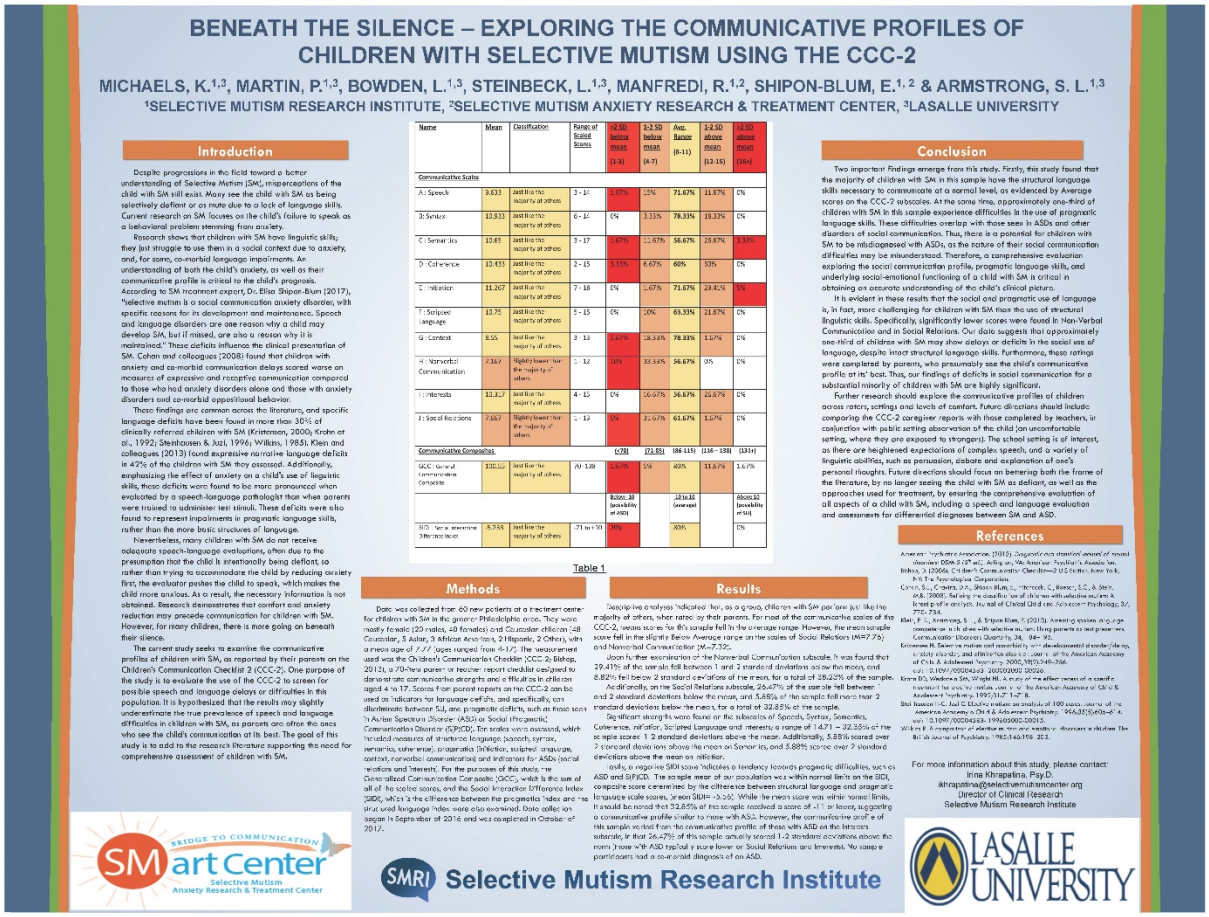
Selective Mutism Research Institute

Beneath the Silence: Exploring the Communicative Profiles of Children with Selective Mutism (SM)

Despite progressions in the field toward a better understanding of SM, misperceptions still exist; current research on SM focuses on the child's failure to speak as a behavioral problem stemming from anxiety. However, research suggests that underlying difficulties with language may be present in a substantial minority of children with SM, and may contribute to their clinical presentation. With the hope of demystifying SM, we explored the communicative profiles of 60 children with SM, using data collected from the Children's Communicative Checklist-2 (CCC-2).

The current study has two important findings: firstly, that most children with SM have the structural language skills necessary to communicate at a normal level, as evidenced by Average scores on the CCC-2 sub-scales. At the same time, a substantial minority of children with SM (approximately 40%) experience difficulties in the use of pragmatic language skills. These difficulties overlap with those seen in autism spectrum disorders and other disorders of social communication. Thus, there is a potential for children with SM to be misdiagnosed with possible ASDs, as the nature of their social communication difficulties may be misunderstood. Therefore, a comprehensive evaluation exploring the social communication profile, pragmatic language skills, and underlying social-emotional functioning of a child with SM is critical in obtaining an accurate understanding of the child's clinical picture.



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